

November 19, 2004

## ***LIFE SKILLS: a Model Illness Management and Recovery Program***

**Mona Goldman, Ph.D., Nancy Mann, B.A., R.N., Michael Jibson, M.D., Ph.D.**

### **Illness Management and Recovery is an Evidence-Based Practice**

In 1998 a consensus panel of stakeholders convened by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJ) identified "illness management and recovery (IMR)" as one of six evidence-based practices for treating adults with serious mental illness. In a recent comprehensive review Mueser, et al. (2002) defined illness management as "a broad set of strategies designed to help individuals with serious mental illness collaborate with professionals, reduce their susceptibility to the illness, and cope effectively with their symptoms" and suggested that recovery occurred "when people with mental illness discover their strengths and abilities for pursuing personal goals and develop a sense of identity that allows them to grow beyond their mental illness." The review presented strong evidence for the effectiveness of individual components of IMR including psychoeducation, behavioral tailoring for medication compliance, training in relapse prevention, and coping skills training using cognitive behavioral techniques. The review also concluded that, while there was "emerging evidence" for the effectiveness of comprehensive programs, the differences between these programs precluded drawing any definitive conclusions. As a result of the RWJ report, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Center for Mental Health Services (SAMHSA - CMHS) began a 5 year project to develop implementation kits to help community mental health centers incorporate IMR and the other five evidence-based practices into their programming. Draft versions of these kits, which are now available online (<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/default.asp>), define key elements of each practice, identify practical considerations for implementation, and provide scales for measuring fidelity to the evidence-based models.

### **Life Skills is an Evidence-Based Illness Management and Recovery Program**

Over the past seven years the Ethel and James Flinn Foundation has generously supported the development and implementation of *Life Skills*, a comprehensive community-based psychosocial training program for people with severe mental illness. *Life Skills* is a model illness management and recovery program that incorporates the evidence-based components described in the SAMHSA/CMHS toolkit. For example, in *Life Skills* psychoeducation is used to impart basic knowledge of mental illness and treatments; behavioral tailoring offers practical advice on how to incorporate medications compliance into one's daily routine; relapse prevention methods help teach participants to recognize and respond to early signs of relapse; and cognitive behavioral techniques are used to teach coping, problem solving, and social skills. Furthermore, *Life Skills* meets nearly all of the fidelity criteria established by SAMHSA-CMHS for implementing an

evidence-based program of illness management and recovery (see attached fidelity scale). These criteria include a program length of at least 3 months of weekly sessions (*Life Skills* provides 20 weekly sessions); a class size of 8 or less clients per instructor (at many *Life Skills* sites this criteria is met; although class sizes are larger at other sites, they are not greater than 15 clients); comprehensive curriculum; the provision of educational handouts (individual client workbooks are provided to all *Life Skills* participants); goal setting; use of motivation-based strategies; use of educational and cognitive behavioral techniques; and coping skills training.

In summary, the *Life Skills* program is comprised of a set of individual practices that have been shown to be effective in teaching the skills and behaviors necessary to achieve the goals of illness management and recovery. A pilot study showed high rates of client satisfaction with the program and an increase in life satisfaction. However, as with all current comprehensive psychosocial programs, more research is required to assess the effectiveness of the *Life Skills* program as a whole.

### **Life Skill Evaluation**

With funding from the Flinn Family Foundation, a pretest-posttest study will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of *Life Skills* at two sites - Rose Hill, a residential treatment facility, and the clubhouse affiliated with Brighton Community Mental Health. (These sites were selected because current clients would not have participated previously in the *Life Skills* program and the client case managers would be available to participate in the evaluation.) Two cycles of the *Life Skills* program will be evaluated at each site and all clients enrolled in those four sessions will be eligible to participate in the evaluation. We estimate there will be a total of 40 – 60 participants in the evaluation. Data will be collected from three sources: clients and their case managers, and course instructors. Clients will complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of each cycle of classes. In addition to baseline socioeconomic data, these surveys assess changes in social adjustment, a sense of belonging, understanding of mental illness, compliance with medications, and overall quality of life. (We have modified our current questionnaire by expanding the number of quality of life questions and simplifying some scales.) Satisfaction is assessed with a brief questionnaire at the end of each class and with a more comprehensive questionnaire at the end of the program. Case managers will be asked to complete a relatively brief questionnaire, the Life Skills Profile (Rosen A, et al., 1989), to assess the client's general functioning at baseline and at the end of the cycle of classes. Instructors will rate and record client participation in each class. A time-line for the project is attached.

### REFERENCES

1. Mueser KT, Corrigan PW, Hilton DW, et al. Illness management and recovery: A review of the research. *Psychiatric Services* 2002;53:1272-1284.
2. Rosen A, Hadzi-Pavlovic D, Parker G. The life skills profile: a measure assessing function and disability in schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 1989;15:325-337.